

Concise Guide for Preparing GIFT Articles

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Abstract

This paper presents a suggested format for “Great Ideas for Teaching” (GIFT) articles. GIFT panels are frequently among the most well-attended panel sessions at academic conferences. While this paper offers guidelines specifically for the Utah Journal of Communication, the format presented is applicable to a wide range of publications in the social sciences.

Keywords: *GIFT, Great ideas for teaching, GIFTS, Great ideas for teaching students.*

Introduction

The term, “GIFT,” is an acronym that stands for “Great Ideas for Teaching.” GIFT articles, also known as “GIFTS” (great ideas for teaching students), are those articles in peer-reviewed journals focused on classroom activities designed to engage students (O’Keefe, 2013).

Going beyond the traditional, “read the text, look at the slides” method of instruction, GIFTS offer educators across the diverse field of communication studies with innovative, engaging, and exciting instructional methods and lesson plans. As such, GIFT articles

should be based upon a classroom-tested principle, theory, or concept the author wants to magnify.

How to Write a GIFT?

To create a GIFT, consider the following example. An often-discussed interpersonal communication theory in the basic communication course (as well as in designated interpersonal communication courses) is Steve Duck’s Relationship Dissolution Model. This model outlines the four phases that relationships pass through on their way to termination (Duck, 1998). The final phase, grave dressing, refers to

communication behaviors partners exhibit in “tidying up” and creating an official ending story (Duck, 1998). This is where the GIFT can occur as instructors search for a way to make these phases memorable and applicable for students.

One avenue in exploring this final phase could be to ask students to share their experiences in what they have heard people say about why their relationship ended. Instructors may opt to introduce some fun research skills by asking them: What is common among these stories? Follow up thoughts might be: Why would people choose to tell the story “This way”?

However, instructors could also choose to go bigger by having students find stories online either in writing or videos that could, in turn, be analyzed for themes. Such work can help students think about their own experiences and better understand the value of “stories” as well as how to structure messages to achieve a particular goal (see Barton & Turman, 2008).

The genesis for other GIFTs may come in the form of classroom management issues such as: How can I get students more committed to reading the syllabus or other descriptive course links to answer some of their own questions? One approach might be to turn this exploration process into a game (see Stein & Barton, 2018). This type of GIFT is simply looking for answers to common concerns instructors have and offering effective solutions.

Formatting your GIFT

Innovative pedagogy can come in many forms, including original teaching ideas, lesson plans, semester-long activities, and classroom assessments.

Original teaching ideas may address any communication course, including

research methods, technologies, theory, interpersonal, intercultural, instructional, mass, organizational, public relations, media studies, and public speaking, whether introductory or advanced (NCA, n.d.).

A complete GIFT submission should contain the following components:

1. a brief title,
2. the course(s) for which the activity is intended,
3. the objective(s) or learning outcome(s) for the activity,
4. a brief theoretical rationale for conducting the activity,
5. a description/explanation of the activity, including any preparation/preliminary steps and necessary materials,
6. a debriefing, including typical results,
7. an appraisal of the activity, including any limitations or variations, and
8. references.

Unit activities or semester-long activities may entail an original teaching activity that takes place throughout an entire class unit that spans several days or weeks or even throughout the semester. Unit and semester-long activities should follow the same format as the single class activity, but will likely be longer than a standard GIFT article.

Classroom assessment articles involve systematic reflection and analysis of instructional practices that improve the quality of specific courses or overall programs (NCA, n.d.). Assessment articles should be data driven and provide educators an opportunity to modify their instructional practices based on the results of such studies.

Assessment articles should contain the following components:

1. a brief title;
2. the assessed course or program;
3. an abstract of 100 words or less;

4. a brief statement of the problem and theoretical rationale;
5. the research question(s) or hypothesis(es);
6. the method for data collection;
7. the results;
8. a discussion of the implications of the results on instructional practice; and
9. references.

Suggested Readings

The following articles are examples of peer-reviewed GIFT articles that were well-written and appropriately formatted.

- Barton, M. H., & Turman, P. D. (2008). "We decided to call it quits": An exercise in applying Duck's dissolution model to students' breakup stories. *Communication Teacher*, 22(2), 35–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404620802023177>
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• Stein, K. A., & Barton, M. H. (2019). The "easter egg" syllabus: Using hidden content to engage online and blended classroom learners. *Communication Teacher*, 33(4), 249–255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2019.1575440>

• Zhao, X. (2020). Auditing the "me inc.": Teaching personal branding on linkedin through an experiential learning method. *Communication Teacher*, 35(1), 37–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2020.1807579>

Conclusion

The UJOC Editorial Board invites all communication educators to take a step back and identify those teaching ideas and practices that should be shared through a GIFT article. Some of these teaching gems will be brand new, while others may be those that have stood the test of time. Searching a variety of journals that publish GIFT articles like the *Communication Teacher*, published by the National Communication Association, is a great place to begin. Below is a list of suggested readings and examples of well-written GIFT articles for educators new to this style of scholarly publication.

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Stein, K. A., & Barton, M. H. (2019). The “easter egg” syllabus: Using hidden content to engage online and blended classroom learners. *Communication Teacher*, 33(4), 249–255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2019.1575440>

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